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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001651

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PKK VIOLENCE -- AND PRESSURE FOR CROSS-BORDER
ACTION -- TOP ELECTION AGENDA

REF: A. ANKARA 1634

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1604 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ongoing PKK violence has made terrorism a top issue in campaigning for July 22 parliamentary elections. PM Erdogan faces pressure from nearly all sides to authorize a cross-border operation into northern Iraq -- and that pressure will inevitably increase in the days ahead. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) PKK violence continues unabated in southeast Turkey, and intense military counterinsurgency operations there continue. As of June 26, 62 Turkish security forces have been killed so far in 2007, with 37 in May and June alone. The PKK is using insurgent techniques seen in Iraq, such as detonating IEDs as convoys pass. On June 23, PKK terrorists exploded a hijacked oil tanker near a Jandarma station in Tunceli province. There were no security forces casualties, but the PKK terrorist and the truck's owner were killed. Turkish officials have for some time expressed concern that the PKK -- from the comfort of its safe-haven in northern Iraq -- is learning how to carry out even deadlier attacks.

[1](#)3. (C) PM Erdogan's government continues to face pressure from the military, opposition, press, and public to carry out a cross-border operation (CBO) against PKK camps in northern Iraq. Erdogan appears to be trying to create as little public space as possible between himself and the military, huddling with top commanders on June 12 (the "security summit"), June 20 (National Security Council meeting), and June 21. He has taken a hard line on Masoud Barzani (calling him a "tribal leader" and ruling out any possibility he would meet him) and praised the military. In June 24 remarks, he emphasized "our priority is to meet in a timely way all the needs of the Turkish armed forces."

[1](#)4. (C) For its part, the military is anxious not to lose the upper hand in the debate. While leading a June 27 media tour of a commando training base in Isparta (to fend off recent press allegations that military casualties at the hands of the PKK are due to poor training), CHOD GEN Buyukanit repeated his April 12 assertion that a CBO would be

militarily useful. He also repeated that the military was awaiting guidance from the GOT, including what the desired "political goal" of a CBO would be.

15. (C) In the meantime, opposition politicians -- especially Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal and National Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli -- have been publicly hammering Erdogan at every opportunity. Baykal in particular has ridiculed the PM for refusing to authorize a CBO, and insinuated that Erdogan has no interest in defending the country against terrorism. When Erdogan questioned the wisdom of attacking PKK camps in Iraq instead of dealing with the problem in Turkey, Baykal snidely suggested that Erdogan was taking the same approach to the PKK problem as Barzani, a particularly grave insult.

16. (C) Public concern about terrorism remains high (according not only to polls but even to isolated villagers in central Anatolia (septel)), though the public may also be distracted by summer doldrums (including record heat) and other developments in electoral politics. A call by the military to demonstrate popular determination against terrorism prompted anti-PKK rallies across Turkey over the past weekend. However, turnout was surprisingly low, with only a hundred or so turning out in Istanbul (perhaps due to extremely high temperatures).

17. (C) As the parties limp toward July 22 elections, we expect the pressure on Erdogan to mount. The PM faces a harsh political calculus with likely negative consequences from both action and inaction. He cannot maintain his government's Iraq policy -- including seeking to solve the PKK problem through political means -- if he is not

ANKARA 00001651 002 OF 002

re-elected. Polls here (albeit often unreliable) repeatedly suggest that both CHP and MHP will get into parliament -- a scenario that leaves Erdogan far less room to maneuver.

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